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While technology advances faster than one can comprehend, and our military's view on continuous education broadens, the Naval Postgraduate School has taken a bold leap into the world of distance and distributed learning using several different methods of dissemination. NPS has put its graduate education at your fingertips, no matter your location, offering more than 40 courses via the World Wide Web and over 100 Video Tele-Education courses.

Video Tele-Education courses have revolutionized the learning process. Students may now teleconference with a facilitator on the opposite side of the globe and still receive the same education offered in a traditional classroom setting. A real-time signal is broadcast from both NPS and the specific command, which allows the facilitator to carry on comprehensive discussions with the class via (ISDN) satellite feed.

NPS's VTE programs are unique. Unlike other distance learning courses, VTE courses may be tailored to fit the requirements of a specific command, whether afloat or ashore. Students will receive the basic course curriculum of the course; however, facilitators may expand discussion to show students how the information applies directly to them and their daily operations.

Prior to FY 2000, VTE courses were the school's primary means of distance and distributed learning. However, in FY 2000, NPS began to receive funding from the Naval Education and Training Command for the development of Web-based learning.

"Our goal is to provide anywhere, anytime, graduate education that is easily accessible," said NPS's Deputy Director of the Office of Continuous Learning, Kari Miglaw. "With new technology so readily available, you can now complete our courses while you're at your workspace, at home or even while deployed."

"In order to meet the demands of educational programs like Sea Warrior and Sea Power, we're going to need a better educated fleet," said Tom Hazard, director of the Office of Continuous Learning at NPS. "But due to the costs of schooling, billeting and classroom size limitations, it was becoming difficult to send students through the schooling they needed. Now students who wouldn't normally have a chance to come to NPS can still get our education, which is one of a kind."

Web-based courses also allow more flexibility in scheduling. No longer are students required to attend scheduled classes or even be at a scheduled VTE session, they may log on the Internet and complete certificate courses at their own convenience. This is a huge advantage to personnel and their commands.

Army Maj. Eric Stierna likes the flexibility of online courses, "I think online courses will really expand the ability of warfighters to build up a diverse technical background to support the range of systems used to perform operations. The downsizing of forces coupled with increasing optempo will continue to trim the duration of "in-house" education. Web-based instruction will span the gap by providing targeted training that complements on the job experience."

Although the courses lack personal contact between student and professor, faculty members go to great lengths to make sure all curriculums translate well into the online courses, so that all information is applicable and easily understandable. Access issues are also being addressed at NPS and at the fleet, where broadband and computer availability are often issues. Hazard said he would like to see that NPS's Web-based courses are accessible to all personnel afloat.

Cmdr. Pamela J. Wynfield expects to take full advantage of NPS e-course offerings, "I will be heading off to be the commanding officer of Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station Sicily in October, and e-courses will be the only way I can keep up with what is happening."

The Web-based courses have been a huge draw throughout the fleet. In FY 2003, the online course completions totaled 247. In FY 2004, that number jumped to 718. By 2008, NPS predicts that number will increase to approximately 1,350 courses.

Course completions are not the only thing that NPS hopes to see expand in the future. "We're working to develop several computer-based simulations, virtual labs, and also trying to incorporate streaming video into our courses," said Hazard. "We're also working with our information technology and communications services to continue to be able to reach out to current and prospective learners once the Navy Marine Corps Intranet is fully activated."

"NPS is expanding its presence in several fleet concentration areas to reach out and market these great tools we provide," added Hazard. "We're also working with NETC and fleet commands to help identify additional resourcing that will allow us to expand our distance learning program availability to the fleet."

"Without Distributed Learning, I definitely would not have the opportunity to take courses offered by NPS. In addition to the flexibility of taking a class while still flying, I like the integration of Blackboard because the discussion boards and interactive lessons replicate the feel of a classroom."

Lt. Sam "Messy" Messer

For available courses or more information on the NPS distance and distributed learning programs, please visit <http://www.nps.navy.mil/dl>. The Office of Continuous Learning is accepting inquiries about Web-based courses and programs, which can also be made online.

